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Yes, Defund the FBI (why and how) Alex Vitale





Alex Vitale

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Ha ha ha ha ha.

Seriously though, I have a plan for that.



Rep. Marjorie Taylor Green...

@RepMTG

DEFUND THE FBI!

8:03 PM · 08 Aug 22 · Twitter for iPhone

There Are Good Reasons to Defund the FBI. They Have Nothing to Do With Trump.

The FBI was created to prop up a system of rule based on white supremacy, inequality, injustice and state violence.

By Alex S. Vitale

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takedowns ensnare large numbers of young people based on their associations, rather than direct involvement in violence. City University of New York law professor Babe Howell showed that in one such mass arrest of 120 young people, half of those charged were simply accused of drug-related offenses, despite being called the “worst of the worst” and held without bail for up to two years awaiting dispositions. (However, even if they had been accused of actual violence, there would be no justification for treating them in this way.) Instead of pouring money into “anti-violence” initiatives that are themselves purveyors of violence, we should be looking to community-driven solutions. The New York City G.A.N.G.S. Coalition and others around the U.S. have called instead for investments in community-based anti-violence initiatives and reinvestments in communities devastated by deindustrialization, redlining and austerity.

In 2019, Donald Trump laid out his plan to use the FBI to help with his reelection effort, called Operation Relentless Pursuit. He targeted seven cities run by Democratic mayors to receive infusions of federal agents and money for more local police to engage in intensive policing of “high crime” communities, backed up by intensive federal prosecutions. Local activists in the targeted cities of Memphis, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Baltimore and Albuquerque mobilized against local cooperation with this initiative citing the lack of federal accountability and the need for community investments, not more policing.

These four steps would dramatically shrink the scope and power of the FBI and pave the way toward abolishing an agency that has not provided real justice or protection for large segments of U.S. society. As right-wingers make a bizarre and twisted case for defunding the FBI, we on the left need to make our own case for defunding the FBI’s intrusive and illegitimate political policing. Then we must go further and question the basic function of federal law enforcement in propping up a system of profound inequality, injustice and state violence.

also dismantle fusion centers and Joint Terrorism Task Forces. As Brendan McQuade documents in *Pacifying the Homeland*, these efforts have had little to do with protecting us from actual violence. Instead, they have morphed into all-purpose “predictive” policing operations that spend much of their time preparing threat assessments for local police and private business interests that both exaggerate the threat of politically motivated violence and use complex algorithms to justify intensive and invasive policing of poor and BIPOC communities.

3) End the FBI’s role in the “war on drugs.” The war on drugs has been an unmitigated failure, if your metric of success is saving lives and improving community safety. If, however, your metric of success is one of criminalizing political enemies and violently targeting the poor and people of color, then the mission has certainly been accomplished. The federal prohibition on many drugs has been a major driver of mass incarceration, the criminalization of non-white communities and the overdose crisis. Susan Phillips’s Operation Flytrap shows how the eponymously named FBI anti-drug sting did nothing to end the flow of drugs into Los Angeles, and instead pointlessly criminalized the most vulnerable people in a community hard hit by poverty, unemployment, and public and private sector disinvestment. In addition, we should abolish the Drug Enforcement Agency, and use the savings to invest in police-free harm reduction projects, high-quality and noncoercive drug treatment, and targeted economic development programs.

4) End the FBI’s role in so-called violence reduction. Presidents have repeatedly used the FBI as a political tool for looking “tough on crime.” “Gang takedowns” and special initiatives have been created to give the appearance of federal action to tackle crime, but have little to show for themselves other than police-perpetrated abuse and mass incarceration. For years the FBI has been using RICO conspiracy laws to target youth violence. As The Policing and Social Justice Project documented in New York City, these

This week the FBI took the unprecedented step of executing a search warrant on the Mar-a-Lago home of former President Donald Trump. No former president has ever been the subject of such an investigative practice. In response, chief Trump supporter and MAGA cheerleader Marjorie Taylor Greene expressed outrage at the FBI’s actions by tweeting, “DEFUND THE FBI!” Far right Rep. Paul Gosar hit similar notes, tweeting, “We must destroy the FBI. We must save America.” While this about-face on “Back the Blue” is an amusing example of the right-wing ideological confusion that ensues when lawmakers adhere to diehard Trump loyalism, we on the left should use this moment as an opportunity to explore a plan to actually do that. The FBI should indeed be defunded — though the reasons for that have nothing to do with the fact that the agency searched Donald Trump’s home.

The January 6 attack on the Capitol showed us the deep fissures in the Back the Blue concept trotted out by the right in response to the Black Lives Matter protests of recent years. While conservatives claim to support the police, they do so on a very narrow basis. Police authority is desirable to them only as long as it is solely directed at what they perceive to be suspect classes, including poor people, BIPOC communities, trans people, immigrants, anti-fascists, sex workers, and other marginalized groups. Built into right-wing support for the police is an understanding — grounded in history — that police authority should not be exercised against the powerful classes, including the wealthy, the politically dominant — and white nationalists. This understanding is why many on the right do not view images of “Back the Blue” proponents beating Capitol police with their Trump flags as hypocritical.

This seeming contradiction helps us get to a deeper truth about the nature of police power. The FBI in particular, and the police in general, were not created to provide justice. Instead, the history of the FBI is one of repressing movements for liberation and carrying out wars on marginalized communities in the guise of wars on drugs, crime, terrorism, gangs and communism, among other

phenomena determined by the state to be threats. The FBI's long-running stretches of state-sanctioned violence have served to criminalize those that challenge the status quo, either through organized resistance or through survival strategies that interfere with capitalist notions of protecting the private property and individual autonomy of the rich and powerful.

The precursor to the FBI, the Bureau of Investigation, was created in 1908 in large part to investigate political threats to the power of the robber barons. These threats included striking workers, anarchists and communists. Driven initially by fears of communist revolution following the Russian Revolution and then the massive strikes and labor militancy of the 1930s, the Bureau of Investigation became the primary federal tool for surveilling and subverting left organizing. It was taken over by J. Edgar Hoover in 1924 and transformed into the FBI in 1934, when it became a massive domestic intelligence-gathering operation with files on millions of Americans including politicians, celebrities, labor leaders, journalists, religious figures, and anyone suspected of subversive leanings, many of whom were people of color, Jews, and other members of historically oppressed communities. Tim Weiner, in his book, *Enemies: A History of the FBI*, meticulously documents the political origins of the FBI and its dirty tricks.

In the 1960s, Hoover identified a new subversive threat: the civil rights movement. The Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), was an FBI-created program that spied on and undermined both socialist leaders and civil rights movement leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., and helped coordinate local attacks on the Black Panthers, the Socialist Workers Party, and many other groups. FBI agents attended activist groups' meetings, openly photographed license plates of attendees, wiretapped phones, sent fake correspondences, and used informants to plant false rumors about marital infidelities and police cooperation to sow fear and dissension. The FBI was directly involved with local

officials in Chicago who conspired to assassinate Black Panther leader Fred Hampton.

The FBI has long been a tool of political subversion used to suppress threats to the status quo. But, in contrast to the claims of Trump loyalists, the focus of the FBI's attacks has rarely been the right-wing extremists that now dominate much of the Republican Party. In his book *Disrupt, Discredit, and Divide*, former FBI agent Michael German points out how federal law enforcement has largely ignored or excused right-wing violence, leaving a focus on Muslim immigrants, environmental activists and the Movement for Black Lives, among other marginalized groups.

Given this history of politically motivated repression, it should be the left calling for defunding and defanging the FBI. Here is a concrete program to begin that process:

- 1) End the FBI's role in political policing. The FBI should be forced to shut down the intelligence-gathering activities that make possible the subversion tactics at the center of the agency's history. Following the revelations of COINTELPRO in the 1970s, the Church Committee attempted this through the power of congressional oversight, but many of the FBI's harmful practices remained, although they were better hidden from view and protected by language intended to restrict — but not eliminate — their activities.
- 2) End the FBI's role in the "war on terror." One of the primary tools in waging this war has been the entrapment of people who are lured into fantastical plots invented by FBI agents so that they can be arrested for planning actions they had no intention or ability to ever complete. The goal of these operations, such as the targeting of an intellectually disabled man in New York who was lured into a FBI-created plot to bomb the Herald Square subway station, seem designed to give the FBI the appearance of winning — to garner support for counterterrorism funding for the agency. We should